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**Fashion-making and Co-creation in the Transglobal Landscape:  
Sino-Italian Fashion as Method**

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## **Fashion-making and Co-creation in the Transglobal Landscape: Sino-Italian Fashion as Method**

### **Abstract**

The 'making' of fashion cannot merely refer to garment production and manufacturing. It is the prerequisite for a nation to actively participate in the global stage. To establish a 'recognisable' fashion image, a country must go far beyond the competition of a specialised garment and textile industry. Being recognised as the 'author countries' for fashion creation is part of a process in which the (re)negotiation of national hierarchies and roles are constantly at play. For a country or a city, expressing an instantly recognisable aesthetic has become an important corollary to communicate political and economic strength. More than in the past centuries, fashion has been tasked with not only reflecting and representing social or individual needs, but also constructing *ex novo* territories in which old stereotypes and imaginer are creatively set free. This is because, unlike most production and commercial activities, fashion expresses an elaborate culture whose composition of symbols, ideologies and lifestyles (Crane 2004) can be drawn on. On the other hand, the accelerated production relocation in past decades has irrevocably changed the geography of fashion, as well as the rhetoric of the origin of national creativity. In particular, it leads one to wonder what happens when two or more players are engaged in the making of fashion. Specifically, what happens when Italy and China collaborate in transglobal fashion-making? How does one account for the national creativity that has sprung from the Sino-Italian co-creation? Drawing on the accounts of Italian fashion and Chinese fashion, this article discusses the intricacy of Sino-Italian collaboration and the entails of such a fashion co-creation, through which, a reflection on transglobal fashion-making is made with the proposition of a framework for its examination.

### **Keywords:**

Sino-Italian fashion; transcultural collaboration; national creativity; co-creation; transglobal

## Introduction

Under the rubric of globalisation, the making of fashion encompasses multiple chains of transnational production, circulation and consumption (Maynard 2004; Jenss and Breward 2016; Welters and Lillethun 2018). The clothes tag *made in* does not necessarily depict authenticity, as it does not reflect the transglobal production process from the raw materials to the end products on the shelf. Adding to this is the crew of transcultural actors and consumers in the fashion supply chain who prompted practices of hybridity and fluidity. The resulting evolving styles (Niessen, Leshkowich and Jones 2003) are not limited to dress styles and consumer practices, but also to the making of fashion brands (Ling 2016). Contemporary fashion-making is typified by transcultural co-creation wherein aesthetics and practices are shared, negotiated and adapted. This transcultural fashion co-creation is exemplified by the Sino-Italian joint ventures.

The first stage of the Sino-Italian joint fashion production in China saw the attempt of the Italians to separate garment manufacturing from the making of fashion. In the early 2000s, the Sino-Italian joint venture was fast becoming an impossible mission for the Italians. Segre Reinach (2005) analysed the process of collaboration by noting that the reality of China between 2002 and 2010 was marked by a series of important and accelerated economic changes that transformed the country from the leader of outsource manufacturing, the infamous factory of the world, into a fast-rate consumer market of global fashion brands. Given China's speedy industrialisation, the Italian factories in China have not only enabled low-cost manufacturing for Italian/European brands, but also enhanced the skills of Chinese labour at an astonishing speed. Today, the label *Made in China* cannot denote inferior quality since production across all market levels is being performed in the world's factory. Indeed, since the reappreciation of RMB in 2005, the cost of Chinese produce has no longer been economical when compared to that of Vietnam and Malaysia, where low-cost manufacturing is now operating.

Only six years elapsed between Segre Reinach's visit to the half-empty luxury mall in Shanghai's Kerry Center in 2002 and the global première in 2008 of the

exhibition *Salvatore Ferragamo Evolving Legend* at Shanghai's Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) for the brand's eightieth anniversary (Figure 1). The latter attracted a host of celebrities from the global fashion world (Movius 2008), attesting to the crucial importance of the Chinese fashion market. The momentum moved quickly in the increasingly urbanised and commercialised China (Rofel and Yanagisako 2019). When Segre Reinach completed her research on the Sino-Italian fashion joint venture in 2010, China was in a whole new era, establishing a fashion system comprised of various production levels, a burgeoning consumer market with first-rate global and Chinese brands and an emerging fashion aesthetic that spoke both globally and locally (Segre Reinach 2019). For instance, leading Italian book publisher Rizzoli Electra released a lavishly illustrated book devoted entirely to the art of couture of one of the most celebrated Chinese fashion designers, Guo Pei (Wallace 2018). Also, the exhibition *New China Chic: A Fusion of East And West* (2018) at the Power Station of Art Museum in Shanghai, curated by London-trained Chinese curator Pooky Lee, examines 'Chinese-ness' through the creation of contemporary Chinese fashion designers, juxtaposing their cultural roots with the west-centric global fashion system by showcasing the exquisite work of Uma Wang, Yingwei Yin, Quihao, Snow Xue Gao and Samuel Gui Yang, among others.

The popularity of Italian fashion in China has proven itself in the healthy sales figures of luxury brands such as Prada, Salvatore Ferragamo and Bottega Veneta (Pologgolo 2018). Italy comes second after France in the fashion and accessory sector among the Chinese upper class, according to a survey conducted by Business Strategies (*ibid*). Indeed, popular Chinese buyers considered the *Made in Italy* label to be an excellent return on their investment. In 2010, luxury fashion brand Cerruti, for example, was bought by the Hong-Kong based company Li & Fung Group for \$70 million; in 2012, Miss Sixty, another well-known Italian fashion brand (Figure 2), was bought by the Guangzhou-based group Trendy International (Verot 2014). The list of Chinese acquisitions of Italian brands continues to grow each year.

While Italian fashion continues to entice the discerning appetite of the huge untapped Chinese market (Ap 2019), in this article, we are interested in the underbelly of the Sino-Italian fashion collaboration aside from the Chinese acquisition of Italian brands. In particular, what does the Sino-Italian co-creation unveil regarding the making of Chinese fashion and Italian fashion? What do the trajectories of this co-creation uncover about the construction of fashion identity with respect to the national narrative? What can we learn about contemporary fashion-making in China, if not global fashion in the transglobal landscape?

This article is part of a research project examining the Sino-Italian collaboration with respect to Italian fashion brands operated by the Chinese and Chinese brands operated by Italians. Three interrelated elements will be investigated: aesthetics and design evaluation through branding, an anthropological quest regarding Italianese vs and/or integrating Chineseness and a post-merger integration (PMI) through economic and political inquiry. The present article underpins the foundation of study for this project. It will begin with an account of Italian and Chinese fashion, followed by the context of the Sino-Italian collaboration, through which a reflection on the research questions will be conducted and the proposal of a framework to examine the case will be provided.

### **A dynamic history of 'made in Italy'**

Italian fashion is generally given two birth dates: one in 1950s' Florence, when Italy freed itself from Paris by establishing its own fashion avenue and boutique, and another in mid-1970s' Milan, fashion designers were infusing with Italian narratives. It is difficult to identify Italian fashion in the first half of the twentieth century, since French-inspired fashion dominated the wardrobe of most European countries. More specifically, French inspiration informed women's fashion, while British models prevailed for menswear. Admittedly, Elsa Schiaparelli and Mariano Fortuny are exceptions. However, the work of Spanish-born Fortuny was closer to fine art than to fashion, and Schiaparelli was an Italian designer who based her professional life in Paris. For this reason, despite numerous points of excellence in various sectors, like the brands Ferragamo and

Gucci, until 1950, only isolated episodes in the history of Italian fashion have been referenced, which is hardly a coherent and continuous history of Italian fashion. The autarchic phase under Fascism had no repercussions on either the international perception of Italian fashion or the promotion of a genuine *development* of the clothing sector, with the exception of research on synthetic fibre. Only from the early 1950s did Italian fashion achieve international recognition. With the 1951 fashion shows, organised by Giovanbattista Giorgini in Florence, Italian fashion took its place in the European circuit, and above all, America. The result was an Italian style identified with codes of aristocratic elegance, but also with the simplicity of attitude, the elegance of the fabrics and the competence of masterful artisans. The 1950s was also a decade of growth for Italian industry. Florentine succeeded in creating the basis for Italian fashion and developing opportunities for a new prêt-à-porter, or ready-to-wear fashion culture which then emerged in Milan in the 1980s. Italian fashion managed to capture this new culture full-blown. The prevailing style was aesthetically attractive, stylistically and structurally independent of *haute couture* and of France, and completely different from both the French *pret-à-porter de luxe* and the Florentine boutique fashion. Italy thus confirmed its engagement with fashion as a language of mass culture.

### **Why can Chinese fashion not be written?**

The history of Chinese fashion, on the other hand, has yet to be agreed upon, as the meaning of fashion remains an open debate. Many people still maintain that the fixity of fashion must be from the West or that there was no fashion during the Cultural Revolution or the pre-Reform era. However, the Eurocentric and Franco-centric theory of the origins of fashion has been revised, scaled down and criticised by anthropologists, historians and fashion theorists (Belfanti 2008; Finnane 2008; Jansen and Clark 2016). On the one hand, *dress* has been defined as a set of modifications and body supplements to the body, thus expanding the notion of fashion in the anthropological sense (Eicher 2008). On the other hand, specific studies based on historical and iconographic sources have demonstrated that fashion, i.e. a more or less swift change in styles, even in past periods, did exist prior to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the period in which the



origin of fashion is usually collocated, and also in places outside Europe. The total fixity of costume not only does not exist; like every human phenomenon, costume also changes, but the very concept of costume is identified as an ideological construction. In the analysis of the evolution of Indian, Chinese and Japanese clothing systems, Belfanti (2008) argued that fashion was indeed not a European invention. The propitious economic conditions and the prosperity leading towards consumption perpetuated the traditional hierarchies of appearance that are usually regulated by canons of a prescription nature. While fashion has fully developed as a social institution in Europe particularly in the dominant fashion capitals with which a well heeled fashion system legitimizes and disseminates new styles and designers, countries like China only evolved partially and without full social recognition. China's fashion system has been rapidly developing in the recent years with its own legitimation, commercially viable brands and trends that spark a national following. However, it has not received the similar praise and recognition of its European counterparts. The country is one of the world's biggest fashion luxury markets with many still favouring European brands. With Chinese owned fashion labels developing at an astonishing rate, they are instead given European brand names with clothing styles replicating international trend. Creativity in China is waiting to gain ground nationally and internationally. While made in China garments fill most wardrobes across the world, Chinese fashion designers have yet to become household names for many. Fashion is arguably a social phenomenon dependent on acceptance by observers and wearers alike. The point at which clothing is accepted or rejected as fashion (Loschek 2009) is the defining point that allows it or forbids it to claim a share in the world of fashion.

Recent studies (Maynard 2004; Teunissen and Brand 2006; McCracken 2014) on the effects of globalisation on people's dress, tastes and habits have sought to further pinpoint those models, constant factors and features with which fashion is spread, thereby making a globalised map with the footprints of fashion traceable. Fashion, therefore, cannot be simply reduced to a form of cultural imperialism or a mere commercial expansion of brands from the West to China and the rest of the world. According to some authors (Eicher 2008; Loschek

2009; Arora 2014), the very expression *expansion of fashion* from Europe to other parts of the world is deemed problematic in that it is already an ethnocentric expression. Indeed, it is further proof of the persistence of the preconception that fashion was born in Europe, the cradle of civilization. The first axiom to question this notion, therefore, did not concern the European and Western origin of fashion, but the association of fashion with Western modernity, while linking the dress of the Rest to the pre-modern tradition. One must bear in mind that the globalisation of fashion proceeds according to an uneven pattern; much like the phrase *leopard spotted*, its flow responds to a logic that has not been recently shaped. Thus, its outcome is the very history of fashion, more so for that of China. The differences and inequalities are at stake in the relation between Europe, China and the rest of the world, from imperialism to colonialism to present-day brand construction (Tu 2010). In the case of China, historical, political, economic and power relations have driven its specific directions, and this is further underlined by continual global interactions (Ling and Segre Reinach 2018). It is, therefore, useful to know the directions in which ideas and trade have moved, in order to overcome former stereotypes and renounce claims to 'pure' sartorial identities, those of product, consumption and communication, which perhaps never existed and certainly do not exist today. Consequently, the concepts of national costume and fashion have ceased to be in opposition between tradition and modernity, as in the colonial culture with which the European and Western fashion was formed between the nineteenth and twentieth century, and are in constant and fertile union. Even heritage, in the present terms of preservation and management, has transformed tradition into the likes of fashion, a typical process in the race of a cultural and creative economy, albeit one not without ambivalences (Garcia 2018).

### **Chinese fashion as a case in point for global fashion studies**

The making of Chinese fashion is a transcultural and transglobal project that can only be operated with the interplay between China and the West, if not the rest of the world, as shown from different points of observation (Ling and Segre Reinach 2018). We are especially interested in depicting its unique path within the global fashion circuit and exploring the representation of Chinese fashion in

the global context. Through China, we consider global fashion in a fresh new way. We maintain that the making of fashion in China started with the Reform in the twentieth century, although numerous directives must be taken into account. The study of the making of Chinese fashion could constitute a theoretical case, and the starting point for future research in global fashion through the interrogation of the varied paths of collaboration, negotiation, adaptation and trajectories. China is, in fact, a crucial site to study the conflicts and uneven experiences in fashion's new world order. The reasons are multiple. First, the majority of its global fashion is manufactured in China. Second, its vast domestic market is of enormous commercial interest to global brands. Finally, China is very keen to make creativity a distinguishing mark for its role of postmarket reform in the world, and fashion is a quick route to such global recognition. Ling and Segre Reinach (2018, 1–12) have revealed that the globalisation of fashion is a heterogeneous process, structuring different forms of national subjectivity within an unstable hierarchy. Studying China, if not global fashion, without considering the heterogeneity of the process, global interactions and the role of the international players only scratches the surface of the subject.

Like other cultural practices, fashion is operated in both the material and immaterial realms. Fashion designers are concerned with both the design and the production of their creation. Garment production and visual representation are inseparable and are usually governed by external pressures and liberties that link together these often severed domains (Tu 2011, 6). As a currency of exchange in globalised relations, fashion in China represents 'a social field of desire' (Rofel 2007, 3) in which multiple collaborations take place. As Bourdieu (1984) observed, it is a playing field with its own specific stakes, the object of rivalry and specific conventions regulating the stakes, which are elsewhere taken for granted as being quite natural. The social desire manifested in such a playing field has intriguingly contributed to the symbolic capital of world fashion, the value of which is under ongoing renegotiation. Fashion as a multidimensional form of knowledge adopts a variety of interdependent expressions, or modalities, each of which is shaped by context-specific and relationally constituted powers. Because such a form of knowledge flows across space and

time at different rates, and with varying degrees of mutation, the nature of the specific reconfigurations in different places and times is always uncertain. Fashion is nonetheless crucially important to the world's garment industries, because it is instrumental in the formation of consumer preferences and, at the same time, leads the ever-changing character of the design-based inputs to the world's garment manufacturing structures (Weller 2006). While the visual composition takes equal weight to complete the notion of fashion, the relation between the material and immaterial components underscores the inquiry of contemporary fashion-making. The case in point here is the co-existence of material and symbolic production in Chinese fashion (Gu 2018), given its 'world's factory' status and emerging visual cultures in fashion.

### **Collaborations: The Sino-Italian joint-venture**

Because China and the western fashion system cannot be taken separately, dissecting the operations of the transglobal landscape of fashion-making necessitates the comprehension of fashion production in China, the process of which is characterised by constantly evolving relations, with a chain of agencies entangled in the correlated macro and micro environment, which are, at times, problematic and conflicted. In the first instance, the monolithic idea of *Made in Italy*, typified by the nation of taste, is made superior to China's image of heavy manufacturing. An aesthetic judgment can only shift from the former to the latter, whereby the latter's rapid mastering of stylistic forms is an inevitable outcome in the first collaborative phase of the Sino-Italian relation. (Figure 3)

The process we describe is ascribable to neither two opposing aesthetics – Italian and Chinese – nor two opposing concepts of fashion. It is, instead, a question of the Italian-Chinese relations as expressed through fashion. Italian fashion has been and is a mirror for China and a model in many ways: the supreme craftsmanship of fashion practices, beyond industrialisation, is the characteristic of both countries (Sequi 2017). Both desire to enhance it with an adaptable fashion system that addresses their respective needs. The reputation of quality, beautiful and well-crafted products and the quintessence of Italian fashion (Lees Maffei and Fallan 2013) fit seamlessly into Xi Jinping's ideology of a 'prosperous,

strong, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful' China (Stanzel et al 2017). Fashion and luxury have become a type of global language, an indicator of contemporaneity (Mc Neil and Riello 2016) and active participation in exchanges among *modern* countries. Mastering fashion, on the Chinese side, not only in its physical dimension, but above all in the creative and symbolic dimensions, has long been considered strategic to build, raise and consolidate the soft power that China has been seeking since the early years of Reform (Keane 2007; Lavagnino and Mottura 2016; Ling and Segre Reinach 2018).

Sino-Italian fashion production has endured different phases of collaboration and exchange since the beginning of the delocalization, i.e. outsourcing, of the *Made in Italy* production in the 1980s. The first phase of the collaboration was marked by direct sourcing or merely a joint-venture (Segre Reinach 2010, 2019). The Italian counterpart tended to remain hegemonic culturally and no less economically. "Creativity is something you are born with," said an Italian manager of the joint-venture, "it can't be taught." (Segre Reinach 2008). The Italians essentialized the capacity of fashion-making, leaving aside the historical reasons of their success in this business. From the early account with the Italians taking part in the joint-venture conducted prior to the rapidly developed commercial and industrial Sino-Italian relations, China was often referred to as something half imagined half real. Findings from these interviews echoed the period of early 1990s when the Italians were "discovering" China Economic Reform. The case in point here is the Italians' eagerness to communicate with China, subsequent to which is the manifestation of various forms of collaboration. Although far from wholly invented, many were successively reconstructed or manipulated to compensate the less adventurous whereas some ended up with more problematic situations.

In a dramatic shift, the last decades witnessed full or partial acquisition, often with major shares, of Italian brands by Chinese entrepreneurs and fashion conglomerates. (Figure 4) The evolution of Sino-Italian joint ventures – from the supposed separation of manufacture and creation, as in the 'sourcing' idealised model of an imagined first encounter (Segre Reinach 2019) to the complete

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3 acquisition of Italian historical brands by Chinese investors in recent years – has  
4 uncovered nothing but the global complexity of the fashion industry. It is  
5 undoubtedly a strategic move based on the business decisions of the  
6 marketplace. Acquiring a well-known and reputed brand is considered, from a  
7 marketing point of view, more effective than building a new one (Xiao 2008).  
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9 Aside from the investment on return, fashion is only a small part of the Chinese  
10 strategy for international expansion. In fact, 2019 marks a new economic  
11 partnership between Italy and China under the new Silk Road project, with Italy  
12 being the first developed economy to join China's global investment programme  
13 (Reuters 2019). Elsewhere, in France, Chinese investors already own  
14 approximately 40% of the Bordeaux vineyards (Jalil 2018). In Britain, the  
15 Chinese have poured most of their investments into the property sector, buying  
16 outright the landmark Walkie-Talkie building for £1.3 billion and the  
17 Cheese Grate building for £1.15 billion in the financial heart of London (Liu  
18 2019). But the cultural dimension of these acquisitions and overseas  
19 investments is perhaps no less important than the economic one, and it will  
20 certainly be full of consequences in the long run (Spalletta 2017).  
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35 Fashion is perhaps most useful in the construction of a visual narrative for a  
36 country in the race for global competition. 'Fashionalisation' necessitates global  
37 interactions and positioning on the global stage (Ling 2012) and demands a  
38 resonating image to underline the fashion narrative of a country (or a city). What  
39 then does the Chinese's convergence on historic Italian brands mean for Italian  
40 fashion? What position do they occupy in the broad sense of Chinese fashion?  
41 And what are the aesthetic and cultural dimensions for both countries? Beyond  
42 the prevailing rhetoric of the Italian media, which speaks of a Chinese 'conquest',  
43 Italian brands becoming Chinese entails complex hybrid and transnational  
44 products being taken as cultural forms in today's fashion (Zhiyan, Borgeson and  
45 Schroeder 2013). If fashion in the twentieth century is no longer about class  
46 distinction, but represents representation, according to Geczy and Karaminas  
47 (2018), then what kind of representation do collaborations in fashion represent,  
48 given the backdrop of global dynamics and transcultural exchanges?  
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### **Sino-Italian co-creation as a method of global fashion studies**

We will conduct qualitative interviews with Italian and Chinese protagonists, and examine the socio-cultural, economic, historical and aesthetic dimensions of the Italian brands becoming Chinese in our ethnographic project of Sino-Italian collaboration. The study will uncover new (Chinese) realities in fashion-making and a new statute for Italian and Chinese fashion. Unfolding the story, the trajectory, the changes and intentions of the acquisition, and the market realities will allow us to unpack the complexity of fashion-making in contemporary China, thereby shedding light onto the development of global fashion in the transglobal landscape.

Our discussion of Sino-Italian fashion collaboration exemplifies an embracing approach in the study of Chinese, if not global, fashion in which contemporary fashion theory is combined with social and cultural frameworks (Bruzzi and Church-Gibson 2013; Jenss and Breward 2016; Rocamora and Smelik 2016). We acknowledge the impact of the shifting agenda of global history on the history of fashion. Against the backdrop of Eurocentric fashion history, recent years saw many studies from Euro-American center-sphere to the periphery. What has been shown through some pioneer works (Welters and Lillethun 2018, McNeil and Riello 2016, Niessen, Leshkowich, and Jones 2003) is the fact that fashion is not exclusive to post-1350 Europe and its diaspora. That fashion is a global phenomenon has been evidenced through past time and space, armed with case studies that allow us to understand the varieties of fashion and change beyond the existing Euro-American models. While global fashion history is in the making, we build on this collective effort to examine fashion-making in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The interaction of local and global forces entailed in the fashion-making process under the rubric of a transglobal landscape remains the backbone for our investigation. In a recent study by Ling and Segre Reinach (2018), a project examining fashion-making in contemporary China with respect to its geographic, socio-cultural, economic and political multiples, three interconnected concepts were highlighted; they are further developed here as methodological tools to examine transglobal fashion-making through the lens of Sino-Italian fashion collaboration. We proposed three interlocking concepts: (1) common belief, (2)

time and (3) space. Central to the study of fashion, they are adopted as the methodological framework to govern the research inquiry instead of a basis for contextualization. Within the framework, we maintain that, first, fashion-making in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is operated in a transglobal landscape in which interaction and exchanges prevail across the globe. Second, time and space are entwined in the transnational, inter/intra-regional, translocal and transcultural networks with various socio-cultural, economical, political and environmental dimensions; all await to be unpacked. In this article, we propose that contemporary fashion-making is a sphere of transglobal activities through which the outcome is necessarily hybrid and co-created. Using the three interlocking concepts as the spine for examination allows us to situate the subject matter, in this case Sino-Italian collaboration, in the agenda of transglobal fashion and dissect the complexity that is entailed in making and consuming fashion today.

### ***Common belief***

The term *common belief* generally refers to former stereotypes and preconceptions, and it starts primarily with the conception of fashion. Like art, the meaning of fashion is an open debate for many. It varies from discipline to discipline, one country to another, and one generation to the next. It evolves over time and has garnered new significance with, at times, conflicting roles along the way. It is not possible to unite its roots with its origin. Argued elsewhere earlier and as seen with the case of China, as well as other regions, its ambiguous conception opens a site for inquiry. Because it crosses borders, bridges and boundaries and transcends disciplines, the definition of fashion is often bounded by its trajectories. Through decades of historical, socio-cultural and economic studies, the dominant Euro-American capitals have unfolded their stories of fashion. While an increasing acknowledgment in the multiple routes of fashion development in the territories of the Other has recently been recorded, we continue to encounter preconceptions rather than the actuality of fashion in places outside of the dominant fashion capitals. Given the embedded social phenomenon, the differences and the power imbalance in the perception and reception of fashion, it is impossible to speak of fashion, especially in the regions outside of the key Euro-American fashion capitals, without the fundamental



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3 details from its locality. Thus, our first proposed concept begins with common  
4 belief. Dissecting stereotypical images of fashion in a region, in our case, China,  
5 levels the playing field for investigation and enables us to question the  
6 preconceived belief and inquire into the specific epidemiology and realities of  
7 fashion. In many ways, confronting the common belief is a direct response to the  
8 Eurocentric vision of fashion. Breaking down the preconceptions unveils the  
9 epidermis of fashion in the studied region. Similarly, unwinding the misbelief  
10 repositions fashion, allowing for an examination of its making. A case in point  
11 here is the stereotypical dissection of Sino-Italian fashion, for which  
12 transcultural co-creation can be understood as the foundation of fashion-making  
13 in China, if not global fashion, and the challenges it poses to the national fashion  
14 narrative for Italy and China, given the inseparable material and immaterial  
15 fashion production in China.  
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### 28 ***Time***

29 Whilst the study of fashion is a project across time interacting with socio-  
30 cultural, economic, political and environmental conditions, the definition of  
31 fashion has much to do with these conditions, both internally and externally. The  
32 debate of fashion vs costume and tradition vs modernity has loomed large in  
33 recent fashion studies. Although the prevailing nature of costume has long been  
34 proven, the term *costume* continues to be widely adopted and circulated. The  
35 notion of fixity emerging from costume appears to give value to the collectors  
36 and, more recently, cultural policy makers who subsequently marketed it as  
37 heritage and/or a national treasure. Irony is often found regarding the revamp, if  
38 not the remake, of this so-called fixed costume as a project of creativity, when it  
39 has undergone imaginative evolution historically. It is not helpful to uphold the  
40 weakness binary of fashion vs costume. On the other hand, the defining point of  
41 the study pertains to how time is taken in the operation in the examined region.  
42 Specifically, China takes time to an immaculate level. It is an unfailing source of  
43 assurance for the country, as only the authority has been able to manoeuvre  
44 throughout history. Recent decades witnessed a sea of change of the Chinese's  
45 social, political and economic policies, which has driven the country to become  
46 one of the key global players. However, the success of an industrial powerhouse  
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is not a prerequisite for a burgeoning fashion nation. The term *Made in China* is maligned as being big, but *created in China* is yet to be recognised. Fashion in China has travelled a long and hard road in order to be acknowledged as the world's next fashion capital, and the journey is ongoing. Our second proposed concept is, therefore, time, which not only scrutinises the opposing binary of costume vs fashion and/or material production vs immaterial production, but also confronts the complicated histories of difference that, in some ways, consolidated such opposition. Time will reveal the effects that the convergence of historic Italian fashion brands in China will have on Chinese fashion and Italian fashion when China strikes to transform itself from a manufacturing giant into a leading manufacturing powerhouse with international recognised brands and quality by 2025 (Tse and Wu 2018). Here, political movement, economic intervention, socio-cultural trajectories, global interaction and transcultural exchanges are the aspects of interrogation. Entwined within these elements, race, identity and power imbalance encapsulate the evolution of fashion.

### ***Space***

Along the way, fashion travels and traverses the frontiers. The making of fashion in the twenty-first century is a transglobal project involving a network of transnational agencies and cross-border activities. Like culture, it is never a pure entity. Underneath its layer, contemporary fashion-making is a transcultural mosaic onto which authenticity is often glossed over for the purpose of marketing and economic gains. The distinction between authentic and inauthentic often turns on nothing more than a statement of authorship. But no statement has value unless it is accepted as valid by its audience, a determination that depends on the shared notions of authenticity, as well as a common understanding of what is designated by authenticity (Heymann 2015). Along this vein, the country of origin has more recently been considered to be the site of construction. That consumers are willing to pay more for the labels coming from countries where quality, creativity and innovation are regarded as premiere has reinforced its economic value. That the country of origin only tells part of the manufacturing journey of a fashion item is no longer an industrial secret. Marketers are toying with the consumers' knowledge of the reality of fashion-

making and their prejudice regarding prestige. Media gatekeepers have joined forces to consolidate the preconceived image of the fashion capitals by having the same transnational crew travel from Paris to Milan during fashion week to execute different designer shows. To what extent fashion identity is exclusive to a particular capital sparks an insightful debate. The essence of the debate appears to relate to the preservation of distinctive images in the dominant fashion capitals. Retaining the statement of authorship, in pristine condition, has thus become a standard practice for the luxury sector. Here, the Sino-Italian fashion co-creation unpacks not only the statement of authorship, but also the construction of Italian-ness and Chinese-ness from the new era of Chinese-acquired Italian brands. The material production in China, exemplified by the *made in* clothes tag, has already dominated the wardrobe of most. Would the Chinese immaterial (re)production, exemplified by China's interpretation of the world's aesthetics, perpetuate through our everyday? This leads to our third proposed concept, that of space, which surpasses national boundaries and flows in multiple directions. The case in point here is the agency, which is central to the making of fashion. Today, transcultural backgrounds and transnational networks are fundamental to fashion agencies. Even consumption has branched into the sans-frontiers cyberspace. Transglobal spatial production, circulation and consumption have given rise to the new world order of fashion.

**Conclusion**

The three interconnected concepts, common belief, time and space, are intertwined and correlated with one another. When discussing one element, another is revealed. The concepts triangulate the examination of Sino-Italian fashion collaboration. Indeed, this interconnectivity enables our analysis of the shifting motion of branding, the conflicting idea of fashion identity and the trajectories of post-merger integration (PMI), which traces the process of fashion-making in China. This article is a preliminary review of the study of Sino-Italian fashion co-creation. Because fashion brand acquisition has in recent decades become common in the global fashion industry, the Sino-Italian example allows us to closely inspect the underbelly of fashion-making. Thus, we draw on the close ties between China and Italy in an attempt to situate Chinese fashion in

the transglobal fashion industry while unpacking its complexity. Consequently, global fashion is given a new voice, and novel ways are revealed to augment its understanding.

### Postscript

Beyond the first phase of joint venture, the new era of Sino-Italian fashion collaboration is underpinned by a strong market economics. The *Italianerie* – the notion to which this special issue dedicates - underneath the fashion relation of China and Italy facilitates transcultural exchanges within which global competition driven by economic intervention takes a sizable share. The fascination for Italian fashion in China under the rubric of *Italianiere* was and will not be a one-way street, i.e. from Italy to China. The instigation of Chinese investment in Italy, albeit economic advancement to both countries and the revival of loss-making Italian heritage brands, poses unwelcoming threat to Italy's European allies let alone the America. While hybrid and transcultural practices may be pertinent to Sino-Italian co-created fashion, Chinese interest in mastering the material and immaterial production to an internationally recognisable standard unravels the Italian reputation in quality, craftsmanship, luxury and branding. The anxiety of which has already widespread in the Italian manufacturing industry. Sino-Italian collaboration is arguably an economic and socio-cultural contest, not necessarily between China and Italy, but for China to launch its global ambition to attain the title of "Middle Kingdom" in the true sense.

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**Italian Summary**

Per una nazione o per una città, esprimere un'estetica immediatamente riconoscibile è diventato un corollario importante per comunicarne la forza politica ed economica. Più che nei secoli passati, la moda ha avuto il compito non solo di riflettere e rappresentare i bisogni sociali o individuali, ma anche di costruire *ex novo* territori e immaginari che fossero creativamente liberi da vecchi stereotipi. D'altra parte, la delocalizzazione accelerata della produzione negli ultimi decenni ha cambiato irrevocabilmente la geografia della moda, nonché la retorica sull'origine della creatività nazionale. Questo porta a chiedersi che cosa accada quando due o più protagonisti sono impegnati nella creazione di moda. In particolare, che cosa succede quando l'Italia e la Cina collaborano alla produzione di una moda globalizzata? Come si spiega la creatività nazionale che emerge dalla co-creazione di una moda sino-italiana? Attingendo a diversi materiali di ricerca sulla moda italiana e sulla moda cinese, l'articolo intende discutere la complessità delle collaborazioni sino-italiane e le implicazioni che derivano dalla co-creazione di moda. Ne emerge una riflessione sul significato di moda globalizzata e la proposta di un quadro concettuale per analizzarla.



Figure 1. Installation of Salvatore Ferragamo to accompany the brand's exhibition at MOCA, Shanghai, 2008.  
Photograph by Simona Segre Reinach.

352x264mm (72 x 72 DPI)



Figure 2. Italian women fashion brand now owed by Chinese fashion group Trendy International. Miss Sixty, Shanghai, 2019. Photograph by Wessie Ling.

198x132mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Figure 3. Garment manufacturer for European brands (1998), joint-ventured with Italian group Miroglio (2004 - 2016), now a Chinese women fashion brand. Elegant Prosper, Shanghai, 2019. Photograph by Wessie Ling.

198x132mm (300 x 300 DPI)





Figure 4. Found and created in Milan by Rosanna Daolio (2001), bought by Chinese Redstone (2005-6), now a Chinese owned brand designed by Gabriele Colangelo (since 2015) with garment claimed to be made in Italy. Giada, Shanghai, 2019. Photograph by Wessie Ling.

198x132mm (300 x 300 DPI)